

138

G. Snegiryov

BIRDS OF THE RUSSIAN WOODS



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ANY DIFFERENT birds live in the woods of Russia. Some, like the titmouse and woodpecker, have almost no fear of people. You can see them in the woods all year round. In winter they even appear in city parks. Others, like the woodgrouse, hawk, and raven, are very cautious and timid. At the slightest danger they hide in a thicket or fly away. Not everyone will notice them. Only those who know birds' habits can hope to see them.





THE RAVEN

Ravens live two hundred years and more and always in pairs. A pair of ravens, flying over the forest, scan every stream and clearing. If they notice the remains of a deer left by a bear or a dead fish on a bank, they pass the word on to other ravens with a "caw-caw-caw". Other ravens hear the cawing and know that there is food somewhere.

You will never confuse a crow with a raven. A crow is grey and a raven black. In winter crows always keep close to where people live and hunt in dumps for bits of food. The raven never comes close to people. It is a bird of the wild, a bird of dense woods.



THE WOODPECKER

If you walk in the woods in spring, you may hear the sound of someone tapping on an empty barrel. This is the spring song of the woodpecker. The bird sits on the branch of a dry tree propped by its stiff tail and taps its beak on the wood.

The woodpecker spends its time of the trunks of sick trees, hammering away with its strong beak and pulling out wood-boring beetles and grub from under the bark with its long tongue.

Sometimes you can find a heap of shelled pine cones under a tree. This means that on the tree the woodpecker has its little forest workshop. It puts the cone into a split branch, picks out the seeds with its beak, gives a push to the empty cone, and flies on in search of the next.

In winter you can often see a flock of titmice following a woodpecker. They are looking for food. If the woodpecker leaves some seeds in a pine cone, the titmice pick them out. And when it chisels at a dead tree, there will always be some beetles or grub left for the titmice.







THE WOODGROUSE

The woodgrouse lives deep in the woods. It is a big cock of the woods. In summer, when bilberries, mountain cranberries, and blueberries are ripe, the woodgrouse feeds on them. On banks of streams it pecks at tiny pebbles so that in its stomach the pebbles will grind up the berries. When winter comes, it eats birch buds and pine needles.

After the snow has melted, Mr. Woodgrouse starts to sing his spring song. He struts about a clearing, ruffling his tail feathers like a turkey and clicking his beak, so that it sounds as if two sticks were striking each other. The song finishes with a rasping sound that reminds you of a knife being sharpened on a stone.





THE LITTLE OWL

The little owl is a night bird of prey. When night falls, it leaves its hollow and flies over clearings in the woods and nearby gardens and listens closely. It hears so well that if a field-mouse gives a squeak, the little owl dives down and snatches the mouse. It takes its prey to its hollow in an old oak, where it makes its supplies for the winter. If you were to look into the hollow of a little owl in winter, you would find many frozen mice. Mice do a lot of harm to the harvest since they live on grain. So the little owl helps people save the harvest.



THE TITMOUSE

Titmice make a woods in winter a lively place. Without them you can hear only a lump of snow drop from a fir tree or the creaking of a pine branch. But when titmice appear, the forest is alive with rustling and chirping. The birds dart from branch to branch and tree to tree, searching every crack in the bark, hoping to find seeds or perhaps a sleeping beetle. There are so many different kinds of titmice. You can see blue titmice, coal titmice, and crested titmice with striped tufts of



feathers on their heads.

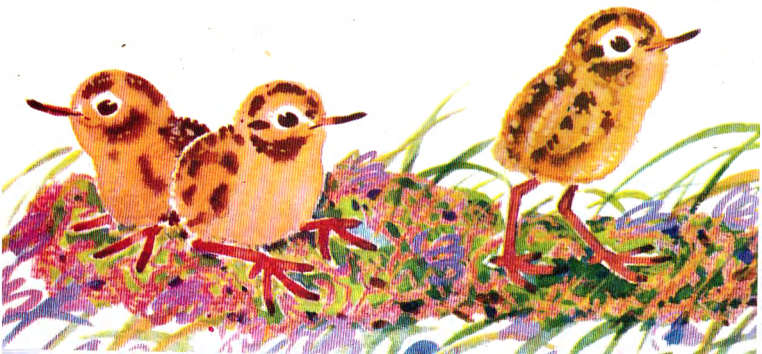
In summer, when the woods ring with the songs of birds, you will hardly see titmice. But they do not fly south in winter, and their gay chirping can be heard all over the winter woods.

If winter frosts are bitter, the titmice fly to where people live. Children put grain or pieces of bread into tiny feeding racks hanging from trees so that the hungry birds will not freeze to death.

THE WOODCOCK

The woodcock has eyes like two big currants, and it can see wonderfully at night. When it begins to get dark, the woodcock hops about on the ground, looking for food. It sticks its long beak into the soft ground and feels about. If a worm or beetle is moving close by, it snaps it up and swallows it.

In the daytime the woodcock hides under a bush. You may pass by and not notice it. If you disturb it in its nest, it will move its little ones to another place, carrying them one by one over the trees in its claws until they are all together again.





THE NUTCRACKER

The nutcracker lives in the dense forests of the north, most often among cedar trees. When the cedar nuts ripen, it busies itself from morning till night, laying in supplies. It stuffs the nuts into the sack in its throat and flies away into the hills, where it finds cracks in stones to hide them. It also hides them in the hollows of trees or buries them in the ground. When spring comes and the snow disappears, the nutcracker often forgets its hiding places but it finds the supplies of other nutcrackers. Squirrels, chipmunks, and mice also feed on the supplies that the nutcracker has stored away. But many nuts remain in the ground, and they produce small cedars. In this way the nutcracker plants cedar trees.





THE KINGFISHER

The kingfisher lives entirely on fish. You can often see it sitting on a branch and looking into the water. As soon as it notices a fish, it dives headlong into the water, snaps up the fish with its beak, and flies back to its nest. The nest is in a deep hole in the river bank and is lined with fish bones and scales. There the kingfisher feeds its little ones on fish. When the fledgelings get bigger, they catch dragon-flies. But later they learn how to sit motionless on a branch over the river, waiting for a fish to come along. When the river freezes over, the kingfisher flies south. But when spring comes, the flying fisherman flashes over the river again, looking like a tiny patch of blue from the skies of the south.







THE GOSHAWK

When the goshawk appears, there is panic in the woods. Everyone has to hide. Even rabbits on the ground hold their breath. The goshawk flies fast among the trees, looking for its prey, and all kinds of small birds, jaybirds, titmice, siskins, and others, fly after it, chirping and calling. If a squirrel is too slow to hide in its hollow, the goshawk snatches it up and strangles it with its claws. The goshawk flies high in the sky, but it can still spot a mouse or gray-hen that has not managed to hide. If it sees a duck's nest, it swoops down and destroys it.

The goshawk even flies into villages and kills chickens in broad daylight. It is not afraid of anything.



These are some of the birds
that inhabit the woods of Russia.
If you learn to watch carefully,
you can learn about many birds
that live in your own country.





Gennady Smerdyov
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Translated by Eugene Vankov-Sky

Illustrated by V. Fedotov

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